
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 December 2025

by **A James BSc (Hons) MA MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 January 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/E2205/Y/25/3374012

The Cloth Hall, Water Lane, Smarden, Kent TN27 8QB

- 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 Barton against the decision of Ashford Borough Council.
 - The application reference is PA/2024/2200.
 - The works are described as 'proposed alterations to approved planning scheme for the conversion of existing barn to holiday let accommodation.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the appeal relates to a listed building and the site lies within a conservation area, I have had special regard to sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
3. Section 1(5)b of the Act states that a listed building includes '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 before 1st July 1948.' It is common ground between both main parties that the barn is curtilage listed and it therefore forms part of the listed building, known as 'The Cloth Hall' (Ref: 1071366).

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the appeal scheme preserves a Grade II* listed building, known as 'The Cloth Hall' and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

5. The Cloth Hall is a large, timber framed dwelling, which was constructed in the 15th century and is Grade II* listed. It has plaster infilling between the timber studs and a crown post roof. The Cloth Hall features traditional diamond paned and small square leaded paned windows and it has a tiled roof. The building was previously a medieval cloth hall. Among other things, the loft doors and suspended hoist with iron hook, provide evidential value of its former use.
6. Adjacent to The Cloth Hall is a former threshing barn, which is believed to date back to around the 18th or 19th century. The barn consists of three bays, with large, glazed openings in the central bay, which would have previously accommodated the threshing doors. The barn has a timber frame, which features queen strut

trusses and cross braces. It is finished with weatherboarding and has a tiled roof. The barn and The Cloth Hall form part of a small group of historic buildings, which are accessed via a private driveway.

7. Based on the evidence before me and my site visit, the special interest of The Cloth Hall insofar as is relevant to this appeal mainly stems from its architectural and historic interests, as an illustration of architecture from the 15th century. The building's timber frame, surviving historic fabric, the presence of traditional materials, its setting, which includes historic, former agricultural buildings and its association with the cloth industry, which was once prevalent in the locality make important contributions in these regards.
8. I attach limited weight to the appellants' contention that the barn lacks heritage significance because it was not individually listed when The Cloth Hall was listed in 1952. It is common ground between both main parties that the barn is curtilage listed. I appreciate that the barn was constructed sometime after The Cloth Hall and was in agricultural use, as opposed to being connected to the cloth industry. However, the barn provides important evidence of the historic evolution of the site; the diversification that occurred as the cloth industry declined; and, the wealth of the farm.
9. The barn has heritage value in itself as an illustration of a threshing barn from around the 18th or 19th century. The barn by reason of its agrarian form, surviving historic fabric, open character and use of traditional materials contributes in a positive way to the special interest and significance of The Cloth Hall, as a designated heritage asset.
10. Consent has previously been granted to convert the barn into a two bedroom holiday let (16/01065/AS). However, the works were not carried out in accordance with the approved scheme and among other things, a third bedroom was created. This appeal seeks to regularise these works.
11. A key characteristic of historic timber framed barns is the openness of their interior space. The Council's Supplementary Design Guidance (SDG) entitled 'The Reuse of Agricultural Buildings' seeks to ensure that internal spatial subdivision is kept to a minimum and that for a barn of this size, one bay remains open. The appeal scheme retains two, full height open bays, which exceeds the guidance recommended in the SDG. In this case, I find that the provision of three bedrooms is not disproportionate for a building of this size and that the open character of the barn is largely preserved through the retention of the other two full height bays. Given that consent has already been granted to subdivide one bay, I find that any harm caused by the further subdivision of this bay is minimal.
12. Nevertheless, the insertion of a third bedroom has led to the need for an additional window, in order to provide natural light to this room. The new casement window is constructed of timber and is small in size and in keeping with other windows found on the barn. I do not find that the addition of this small window results in an excessive number of openings on the barn. However, in order to facilitate this new opening, some historic timber studs have been removed. While the appellants advise that the timber studs were in a poor condition and needed removal due to concerns over their integrity, there is no substantive evidence before me of their condition nor why they could not have been repaired. The appeal scheme has

resulted in the loss of a small amount of historic fabric, which has caused harm to the special interest of this historic building.

13. A new external door has been inserted, which has a glazed lower panel and two glazed upper panels. Although the door is constructed of timber, it is domestic in appearance and fails to respect the agrarian character of the barn.
14. The appellants advise that a new wall was built to support the barn door openings and that a damp proof course (DPC) was installed in this location. There is limited information before me on the DPC that has been inserted. It is imperative that schemes are accompanied by drawings and specifications of sufficient detail to illustrate and/or describe the works. This is necessary in order to avoid any uncertainty in respect to what the scheme seeks consent for and to allow a robust assessment of such works.
15. The appellants have provided a cross section of the floor detail as per building control records, which states that the stone plinth is to be made good and left exposed. However, the floor detail refers to modern, synthetic materials, which are not traditional or authentic and fail to respect the historic integrity of the listed building. There is insufficient information before me to demonstrate that this is the most appropriate solution for this historic barn. While it appears from the evidence before me that concrete was present on the floor of the barn prior to its conversion, there is limited information before me of the extent of this concrete and when this was introduced.
16. The Council raises no objection to the amendments to the layout of the first floor bedroom and en-suite. Based on the evidence before me and my site visit, I find no reason to reach a contrary conclusion to the Council on this matter and find that this element would preserve the special interest of the listed building.
17. The appeal scheme also seeks consent for full height glazing to the first floor bedroom in order to provide privacy. The glazing has clear and opaque modes, which enables the volume of the barn to be appreciated, while retaining good visibility of the roof timbers. Accordingly, I find that this element preserves the open character of the barn.
18. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal scheme in its entirety fails to preserve the special interest of the listed building. While I appreciate that the works are not visible from the public realm, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not public views of the building, or any of their curtilage structures can be gained.
19. Given the nature and extent of the works, I find the harm to the significance of the listed building to be 'less than substantial' and at the lower end of the scale. However, this should not be equated with a less than substantial planning objection and is of considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the appeal scheme, including where appropriate, securing the asset's optimum viable use.
20. There is a small economic benefit due to the construction works, which I give limited weight as a public benefit. The appellants argue that the two bedroom scheme is unviable. I appreciate that the appellants have made a significant investment into the buildings and gardens; however, there is no substantive

evidence before me that the consented, two bedroom scheme would not be viable or that the holiday let use would cease in the absence of this consent. There is also no compelling evidence that the appeal scheme is necessary to secure the optimum viable use of the asset or the long term conservation of the building. Consequently, clear and convincing justification for the harm to the asset's significance arising from the appeal scheme has not been provided.

21. On balance, in giving considerable importance and weight to the harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, I find that the public benefits that arise from the appeal scheme are not sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified.
22. Accordingly, I conclude that the appeal scheme fails to preserve the special interest of the Grade II* listed building. The appeal scheme fails to comply with the requirements of the Act and the historic environment policies of the Framework. Conflict also arises with Policies SP1, SP6 and EN14 of the Ashford Local Plan 2030, adopted February 2019. These policies among other things seek to preserve or enhance the heritage assets of the Borough, sustaining and enhancing their significance and the contribution they make to local character and distinctiveness.

Other Matters

23. The appeal site lies within the Smarden Conservation Area (CA). The CA covers the historic core of the village and is centred around a historic church. There is a high concentration of listed buildings within the CA. The significance of the CA insofar as is relevant to this appeal is derived from the high concentration of timber framed historic buildings, which denote the industrial and agricultural heritage of the locality.
24. The works that are the subject to this appeal are largely internal or sited on an elevation that faces away from the public highway. Accordingly, the works have a negligible impact from the public domain and limited prominence from the private domain. Unlike listed buildings, the significance of a CA is dependent upon how it is experienced. Under such circumstances, case law¹ has established that works must be judged according to their effect on a CA as a whole and must therefore have a moderate degree of prominence. Given the above, I find that the appeal scheme preserves the character and appearance of the CA.

Conclusion

25. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A James

INSPECTOR

¹ South Oxfordshire DC v SSE & J Donaldson [1991] CO/1440/89