

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL – DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT
DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION No: S6/2015/1160/LB

SITE ADDRESS: Northaw Equestrian Centre, Northaw Road West, Northaw, Potters Bar, EN6 4NT

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT: Conversion of barn to dwelling which includes the insertion of a first floor, seven rooflights and windows and doors at ground floor level.

RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE CONSENT

1. SITE AND APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:

The application site is located within Northaw, which is to the west of Cuffley. The site is situated on the summit of a hill with the land dropping away into the valley of the Northaw Brook to the south west.

The application site is a rectangular area of land located on the road frontage with Northaw Road West, approximately 175m east of the junction with Park Road. The site is currently a mixture of hard surfacing, buildings and landscaping and is used as a Riding/Equestrian Centre.

The site itself is comprised of; a residential unit, a number of stables, storage barns including a listed barn, a car storage area, ménages, covered storage, a garage and other ancillary structures.

This application concerns a Grade II listed barn which is a timber-framed barn and has a rectilinear footprint, with its principal elevation facing to the northeast. The barn has a side gabled roof, with fairly steep pitches, and an added hipped-roof projection from its southwest elevation above the cart porch. The barn entrance consists of a large two-leaf full-height sliding door at its centre, leading to the main threshing floor. It is currently used for stabling.

The list entry describes this asset as:

“Barn. C17. Weatherboarded. Slate roof. 5 bays, mostly intact. Complete floor plate resting on red brick base. Cart entrance on S with replacement hipped roof. C18 and C19 red and yellow stock brick 1-storey addition on SE with 3 arched openings.”

This application seeks consent to convert this building to residential accommodation. Works include the insertion of a first floor, seven rooflights and windows and doors at ground floor level.

2. SITE DESIGNATION:

The site lies within Northaw, within the Metropolitan Green Belt, Northaw Common Parkland Landscape Character Area and an Area of Archaeological Significance, as designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

S6/2015/1159/MA - Conversion of barn to dwelling and erection of no14 dwellinghouses following demolition of existing structures on site. Pending consideration

S6/1984/0650/LB - Demolition of building. Refused

S6/1979/0720/LB - Demolition of house. Granted

4. CONSULTATIONS:

Historic England

None received

The Georgian Group

None received

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

None received

The Victorian Society

None received

Ancient Monument Society

None received

The Council for British Archaeology

None received

Welwyn Hatfield Conservation Officer

"The most important building is agreed to be the former threshing barn that lies towards the centre of the site oriented E-W. This is listed as a C17th timber framed barn largely weather-boarded and with a slate roof but with a C18th and C19th brick built single storey addition on the SE.

In the heritage statements, the early date of C17th is questioned, mainly due to cartological evidence. Whilst this evidence is strong, the main body of the barn is acknowledged as being of one period and in my view it is difficult to accept that the

heavy scantlings and curved braces date from later than the C17th, let alone the C19th date suggested by the cartological evidence. It is possible of course that the building could have been dismantled and re-erected on this site in the early C19th, the later south porch being added at that time.

Whatever the date, the heritage statements acknowledge the building to be of special architectural and historic importance and “of some quality both visually and historically. It also recognises that “....internally, the single –volume space of the principal cell is visually and physically striking.....”

I would myself add that it also retains an exterior, which largely un-perforated by later openings and that therefore it retains the two most characteristic elements of the building type. It is also undeniable that the intricacy of the timber framework and the rustic feel of the interior of the weatherboarding remains a characteristic feature. The low level partitioning associated with the equestrian use is acknowledged in the statement as not detracting significantly from the impressive open interior and one might add that this is typical of this use, which has a light touch and is generally compatible with the characteristic appearance of historic agricultural buildings.

The second historic building is not listed but also retains this characteristic form of a barn, both inside and out. Whilst not of the same quality of the listed barn, and of a later date, it retains early features to the timber frame, such as curved braces but I would agree that the reason for this is likely to be the re-use of framing from an earlier building and this is born out by the presence of blind mortices and the like on timbers that have changed their structural role. Also here, the equestrian use has allowed the interior to retain some of the grandeur of the listed barn and externally the building is again little fenestrated and retains the feel of an historic agricultural building (possibly a barn).

The external finishes are less original than the listed barn and include corrugated iron roofing to both nave and lean-tos. However, in my view the building is an historic asset, albeit undesignated and is of very positive presence in respect of the setting of the listed barn.

The rest of the buildings are of variable quality and some of them are of a larger scale than the listed building but they are of the type that one expects to see associated with an historic agricultural building and they still roughly follow the historic form of the C19th farmyard to the north of the listed building and its later extension to the south. They are cumulatively neutral in effect, some being fairly insignificant but the large barn on the frontage has a greater effect because it partially masks the view of the LB from the road frontage.

The farm house is a mid-C20th building, which replaced the historic C18th house. It is of one storey with first floor accommodation within a mansard roof and therefore effectively 2 storeys in scale. However, the dark slate of the roof planes and the dark stained cedar shingles on the walls give an overall recessive character to the building which could be regarded of neutral effect.

The continuous decorative front boundary wall has a negative effect on the setting of the LB because of its prominent location. However, it's low height mitigates the effect and it is therefore not strongly negative.

***The proposal** includes the demolition of all the buildings save the listed barn. Whilst the loss of the farm house and the modern agricultural buildings would not be particularly significant, the barn to the east of the LB is considered to be both of intrinsic historic and architectural significance and of highly positive effect on the setting of the listed barn, because it places it in context with part of its historic setting and because the form, materials and aesthetic character reinforce that of the LB. Therefore it follows that the demolition of the building would harm its setting. The replacement building would be in roughly the same place and orientation and there would be a courtyard of new buildings, roughly approximating to the existing and therefore former, farmyard arrangement.*

These would be 2 storey buildings of roughly the same height as the existing barn and they would mask the view of the LB in the same way as the existing modern building, probably more. Therefore there would be no advantage in this respect. Unlike the buildings in a traditional farmstead, these would all be of similar height and form to the LB and would be designed to look like barn conversions. I.e. they would have weather-boarded walls and black tiled roofs but these would be perforated by a myriad collection of windows, roof lights, glazed doorways and the de-rigour fully glazed former threshing door openings. By these means they would tend to both devalue the authentic appearance of the LB and to detract by reason of the number of openings. In the event however, the character and appearance of the LB would itself be brought down to the same level by the imposition of exactly the same type of elements.

The courtyard formed by the new buildings and the LB is shown to be landscaped with a formal garden which would be at odds with the character of the LB and indeed the new "barns conversions"

The drawings of the new buildings are to a small scale and it is not possible to judge their detailed appearance and unfortunately the same applies to the LB. To design or judge the design of alteration to a listed building requires detailed drawings, so that proper weight is given to both design decisions and assessment. These drawings are therefore inadequate and could never form the core of a listed building consent. However, it is evident from the drawings even as they stand, that little understanding of the character of the essential character of the building type has informed the design.

The essential characteristics of a barn interior are the impressive height and single volume of the nave, the intricacies of the timber framing and rustic qualities of the interior of the interior of the boarding. Externally, the large expanses of weather-boarded walls and tiled or slated roofs each virtually unbroken by openings save the massive threshing doors.

Needless this character is not a good match for residential use and so a change from equestrian, which is a good match, tends to compromise the essential character.

The drawings exhibit all the usual problems. The volume is split up into smaller cells and cannot be appreciated as an entity. A first floor is introduced which doesn't allow sufficient appreciation of the height. In this case, the rear porch is joined up with the rear lean-to and part of the nave so that ironically where there should be separation there is none and it is likely that irreversible loss of historic construction would result. Externally, the face of the building would be pock-marled with myriad openings and the noble threshing door openings flat glazed and split into domestic sized panes. The remainder of the site, to the west of the former farmyard, which is currently open and either ménage and pasture or garden associated with the house, would be developed with a standard suburban layout of detached 4 bedroom houses of a standard type that are not locally distinctive and could be found anywhere in the country. These too are harmful to the setting of the LB because where there was openness, there would be loss of openness, even though there would be some mitigation by the small paddock to the south of the LB."

5. NEIGHBOUR REPRESENTATIONS:

The application was advertised by means of site notice and press notification. 12 letters have been received from addresses in The Walk, Northaw Road West, Goffs Oak, Northaw Road, Church Lane, Park Road and Bradgate in objection to the proposed development. Comments specifically relating to the listed building :

- The proposed conversion of the listed building is not the only means by which to ensure its long term preservation.
- Harm to the heritage aspects of the equestrian site.

6. TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIONS

Northaw and Cuffley Parish Council have objected to the proposal for the following reasons:

- The development would be situated on Green Belt land and there are no special circumstances for this type of development. Even if this was permitted under 'sustainable development within a defined urban area' this development is not in scale with and does not reflect the character of the village nor does it provide affordable housing for the local community. It would therefore cause substantial harm to the Green Belt which is not outweighed by other considerations.
- The Localism Act encourages and enables communities to have genuine opportunities to influence the future of their area through the Neighbourhood Plan and we believe any refusal to acknowledge the content of an emerging NP in determining an application goes against the spirit of how the act was intended. Northaw and Cuffley have an emerging Neighbourhood Plan which should go to our parishioners' at the end of 2015.
- This is not a sustainable development. NPPF states to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities, this does neither.

- The scale of the development is inappropriate to the size of the village. They are a mix of three and four bedroom houses.
- The Local Plan has not identified Northaw Park Farm as a SHLAA site.
- The developers claim 'There is a substantial hedge on Northaw Road West' which there maybe but this is because of the inability of the owner to maintain any of the hedges along Northaw Road West and therefore they are only substantial for that reason. Hedgerows were created by man and require management to ensure their both their continuing good condition and their survival.
- The provision of a field for use by residents and the community is not necessary. The village already has a park and a community orchard and is served by a good network of footpaths and bridleways.
- The existing business (equestrian) is long standing and very appropriate to this setting. This would mean a loss of employment for the area and the loss of pleasure for children and adults for this outdoor activity. It is a very good amenity which is well used and one of the few currently existing in Northaw. 2.
- The Flood Risk Assessment states there is very little likelihood that the development would be connected to the main sewer. '3.6 Sewer records, obtained from Thames Water, show there are no surface water or foul sewers located in the immediate vicinity of the site. There is however a foul water sewer serving the properties to the north of Northaw Road West, which is located in their rear gardens and crosses Park Road to the west. Due to the location of this sewer, which crosses private land, it is unlikely that the properties on the proposed development site would be able to connect to them.'
Any alternative measures would make a further impact on the site.
- The bus services are irregular and being reduced again soon. The suggestion that the new residents would use this service is not viable. Occupants would have to drive or cycle or walk to access shops, doctors, dentist, library and post office services.
- Using the listed barn for residential purposes to ensure its long term preservation does not overcome the identified harm.

7. MAIN PLANNING ISSUES AND RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES:

The main planning issues with this application are:

1. The potential impact on the heritage asset (Section 12, paragraphs 126 to 141, of the NPPF)

8. ANALYSIS:

1. The potential impact on the heritage asset (Section 12, paragraphs 126 to 141, of the NPPF)

The specific historic environment policies within the NPPF are contained within paragraphs 126-141. Paragraph 131 of the NPPF states that in determining planning applications, Local Planning Authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets. Paragraph 132 of the Framework outlines 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 133 states that where proposed development will lead to substantial harm or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, Local Planning Authorities should refuse consent unless it can be demonstrated that the harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm. Where the harm is considered less than substantial, Paragraph 134 states that this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The NPPF therefore does allow for a degree of harm to a heritage asset in particular circumstances. Furthermore, though not fully consistent with the NPPF in the above regard, Policy D1 requires proposals to feature high quality design

The south side of the historic farmyard is defined primarily by a Grade II listed barn. This timber-framed barn has a rectilinear footprint, with its principal elevation facing to the northeast. The barn has a side gabled roof, with fairly steep pitches, and an added hipped-roof projection from its southwest elevation above the cart porch. The barn entrance consists of a large two-leaf full-height sliding door at its centre, leading to the main threshing floor. It is currently used for stabling.

The applicant has submitted a Heritage Statement that acknowledges this buildings' special architectural and historic importance, stating that the volume space of the principal cell is visually and physically striking. This building also retains an exterior, which is largely un-perforated by later openings and it retains the most characteristic elements of the building type. It is also considered that the intricacy of the timber framework and the rustic feel of the interior and of the weatherboarding remains a characteristic feature. The low level partitioning associated with the equestrian use is acknowledged in the Heritage Statement as not detracting significantly from the impressive open interior and one might add that this is typical of this use, which is generally compatible with the characteristic appearance of historic agricultural buildings of this nature.

The essential characteristics of this barn interior are the impressive height and single volume of the nave, the intricacies of the timber framing and rustic qualities of the interior boarding. Externally, the key characteristics are the large expanses of weather-boarded walls and tiled or slated roofs, each virtually unbroken by openings save the large threshing doors. The proposals seek to convert this building into a one and a half storey dwelling house.

Though the drawings are limited in terms of detail with regards to works to the listed building, it is considered that greater detail may be provided, if minded to approved consent, through the imposition of relevant conditions. Notwithstanding this, the development would involve the volume of the building being split up into smaller cells (through the creation of various rooms) and the insertion of a first floor. The building,

therefore, would not be appreciated as an entity and the proposal would not allow for sufficient appreciation of the height of the building.

Externally, the face of the building would be perforated by residential openings (windows and doors) and the threshing door openings would be flat glazed and split into domestic sized panes. Furthermore, as the rear porch would be joined up with the rear lean-to and part of the nave there would be no separation of these elements and it is likely that, as a result of this, there would be an irreversible loss of historic construction. Taking the above into account, it is considered that the proposal would result in significant harm to the historic and architectural significance of the listed building itself.

Taking all of the above into account, it is considered that the works involved to enable the conversion of the building itself would compromise the essential character of the heritage asset. As such, the historic and architectural significance of the building would be substantially harmed, contrary to Section 12 of the NPPF. In addition, the development does not represent high quality design and is therefore not in accordance with saved policy D1.

Paragraph 133 states that where proposed development will lead to substantial harm or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, Local Planning Authorities should refuse consent unless it can be demonstrated that the harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or the development meets a number of listed criteria.

The applicant has stated that there are substantial public benefits that outweigh any identified harm. These include physically enhancing the setting of the heritage asset and ensuring its future use, care, maintenance and therefore survival. The wider development would also provide 14 homes within the Borough.

The setting of the listed building would be significantly and demonstrably harmed by the residential design and layout of units and the loss of the existing buildings, which are more rural in nature than those proposed, which is proposed within the wider development (S6/2015/1159/MA). Also, with regards to the above assessment, the proposal would cause substantial harm to the listed building itself by virtue of the erosion of the key characteristics that lend to the significance and interest of the building. Additionally, following a site visit, the listed building did not appear to be in a state of disrepair and there is no evidence that the continued use of the site for equestrian or agricultural purposes would result in a threat to the survival of the building.

Furthermore, it has been acknowledged during the consideration of application ref. S6/2015/1159/MA that the proposal would contribute towards the Borough's housing stock. However, the development would contravene the Council's housing strategy and would be environmentally unsustainable within the Green Belt. As such, the provision of homes is not considered a substantial public benefit with regards to paragraph 133 of the Framework.

Taking the above into account it is considered that the limited public benefits provided by the proposed development would not amount to the substantial public

benefits required to outweigh the considerable identified harm to the heritage asset and its setting. Furthermore, given that the nature of the heritage asset does not prevent the reasonable use of the site and the site is already in use as an equestrian centre, the proposal fails to meet all of additional criteria listed within paragraph 133 of the Framework required in the absence of substantial public benefits. There is, therefore, no clear and convincing justification to allow for the identified harm to the heritage asset.

9. CONCLUSION:

The essential characteristics of this barn interior are the impressive height and single volume of the nave, the intricacies of the timber framing, the rustic qualities of the interior boarding and the large expanses of weather-boarded walls and tiled or slated roofs, each virtually unbroken by openings save the large threshing doors.

As discussed above, the works involved to enable the conversion of the building would compromise the essential character of the heritage asset, resulting in a loss of the internal volume of the building and perforating the exterior elevations with a considerable number of residential features. As such, the historic and architectural significance of the building would be detrimentally impacted upon. This harm is considered to be substantial.

Given the overarching statutory duty imposed by S.66, which requires considerable weight to be given to the desirability of preserving the setting of all listed buildings, having regard to the above harm and the effect of the proposal on the listed building, and as there are no public benefits which would outweigh the substantial harm to the significance of the listed building, the proposed development is contrary to the NPPF and policy D1 of the District Plan.

10. REFUSAL

1. The proposed conversion of this barn to a residential unit would, by virtue of the perforation of the exterior walls with a large number of residential features and by the subdivision of the large expanse of the volume of the building to form internal rooms and a first floor, erode the key characteristics of this heritage asset. This would have a deleterious impact on the special traditional, rural and historic interest of the building. This is considered to amount to substantial harm to the designated heritage asset. The Local Planning Authority does not consider there to be substantial public benefits arising from the proposal that would outweigh the harm caused to the significance of the listed building nor are all of the remaining criteria of paragraph 133 of the Framework met. As such, the proposal is not of high quality design and is not in accordance with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy D1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

2. Insufficient information has been provided within the application's drawings to establish the extent of internal works to the building. It is therefore not possible to establish whether, if there are works, they would cause harm to the heritage asset through loss of historic fabric. The proposal therefore cannot be properly considered against Policy R27 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and paragraphs 131-133 National Planning Policy Framework, 2012.

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR REFUSAL:

The decision has been made taking into account material planning considerations and where practicable and appropriate the requirements of paragraphs 186-187 of the National Planning Policy Framework (see Officer's report which can be inspected at these offices).

REFUSED DRAWING NUMBERS: HL-001 & HL-003 & HL-005 & HL-008 & HL-017 & HL-018

INFORMATIVES:

None

Signature of author..... Date.....