

Principal Conservation Officer: Objection

Site

Cotterell Farmhouse is Grade II listed and dates from the 18th century. It formed part of a farmstead that was planned as a regular 'U-shaped' courtyard. This includes a Grade II listed Granary and converted barns.

The plan (including the barns and granary) adds to the historic significance of the Listed Building and its setting. Historically therefore Cotterell Farmhouse was a remote cluster of buildings. It is important that the sense of isolation from the surrounding urban expansion is retained. It should not be consumed by the expanding back land development and needs to retain its agricultural setting and changes and respect the key aspects of the unaltered plan form. The significance of Cotterell Farmhouse not only lies in its architectural value but also *in* its evidential value as a physical document of past agricultural practices and rural settlement. This allows the observer to properly appreciate the functional origins of the complex and its relationship with the surrounding agricultural land.

A traditional farmstead or farm building will have significance if it makes a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, whether it is designated as a heritage asset or not. It is clear in this case the Farmhouse, granary and barn make a positive contribution in their current form to the character of the area.

Policy Context

Before proceeding to consider the policy context of the NPPF, it is of primary importance that the correct weight should be attributed to the desirability of preserving the setting of the listed building from the outset, in accordance with section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990:

"In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses"

The need for the decision taker to attach considerable or special weight to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings has been reinforced through two recent high court decisions of: Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Limited vs. East Northamptonshire District Council et al (2014); and North Norfolk District Council vs. DCLG and Mack (2014).

The above statute and its subsequent and consistent interpretation in recent high court decision emphasises the need for the policies of the NPPF to be implemented whilst always having regard to the need to give special or greater weight to the preservation of the setting of a listed building.

Where the impact on the setting of a listed building has been assessed in accordance with paragraphs 128 to 132 of the Framework, and has been found to fall within the category of 'less than substantial harm' (i.e. paragraph 134), then it is still important that when considering the balance

exercise, and therefore the public benefits of any such proposal, that from the outset this is consciously weighed in favour of the need to preserve the setting of the listed building.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and sets down the policies that the Council must take into account when determining planning applications. This supersedes PPS 5, however, English Heritage (web-site 23 April 2012) advises that the Practice Guide (HEPPG) remains a valid and Government endorsed document pending Government's review of guidance supporting national planning policy as set out in its response to the select Committee".

The NPPF sets out, in paragraph 17, the 12 core planning principles that local planning authorities should consider in making planning decisions. One of these core principles relates directly to conserving heritage assets, as follows

"Planning should conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations;"

Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework states 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. It also goes on to state that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 133 provides guidance in relation to development proposals that cause 'substantial harm'. While, paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy states that where a development 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.

Paragraph 64 (Section 7 – Requiring Good Design) is also particularly relevant to this case in that development should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

At local level Policy CS11 of the adopted local plan applies. These policies are supplemented at national and local level by supplementary guidance. Most pertinent to the current application are:-

- The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England) 2017.

Assessment

The setting of a heritage asset is defined in the glossary to the Framework as the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. In simple terms, setting embraces all of the surroundings from which the heritage asset can be experienced, or that can be experienced from, or with, the asset. The development proposed would be clearly visible from the listed buildings and there would be areas within, and outside, the site where the listed buildings and the proposed development would be seen in juxtaposition. On that basis, it is clear that the proposal would have an impact on the setting of the listed building concerned.

Looking at the appeal decision from 2017 it was clear that the inspector considered the site to have a positive contribution to the significance of the heritage asset. He stated that:

“the site forms part of an attractive garden setting to No 70, which buffers it from nearby properties by providing an appreciable gap in built form on that side. This helps give No 70 some ‘breathing space’ and something of a stand-alone appearance from built development that is not historically related to the position of the farmstead. Consequently, it makes an important contribution to the setting of the listed building and the way it is perceived from the public realm.”

The setting of Cotterell Farmhouse contributes to its significance by placing it in a rural context similar to that in which it was constructed and operated. Changing the hinterland of the listed buildings from undeveloped garden land with trees and hedgerows, to one large new dwelling with garaging, would reduce the ability of the observer to appreciate the origins of the complex, and its relationship with the land. This would have a harmful impact on the setting of the listed buildings.

The dwelling itself is too large and is largely of an inappropriate design with only the front elevation bearing any resemblance to a barn. The rear outshot and garaging to the side complicates the structure making it appear more like a regular dwelling. This in turn makes the building feel particularly large in this sensitive setting.

Whilst the development proposed is reduced from the 3 dwellings originally proposed it will still be very apparent from the new access. The positioning of the structure also bears no resemblance to a farmstead and such appears out of character. It should also be noted that the building is located in a setback position. This is out of keeping with the established linear and road-facing pattern of development nearby. Again, this was borne out in December 2017 appeal decision.

Based on the information submitted, any development along these lines would impact negatively on the strong visual and spatial relationship between Cotterell Farmhouse and the surrounding land. Introducing a development, is fundamentally at odds with its rural environment. For these reasons, the proposal in its current form will be harmful to the significance of these designated and locally prominent Grade II listed building through the impact on their setting

In accordance with the NPPF I believe the degree of harm to this listed building would be significant, but on balance, less than substantial. In this context, the NPPF requires such harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.