



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 December 2024

by Stephen Normington BSc, DipTP, MRICS, MRTPI, FIHE, FIQ

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 January 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/D/24/3344365

Rushton House, Lower Chapel Lane, Grindleton, Lancashire, BB7 4QT

- 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 Tony Cann against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 3/2023/0973, was refused by notice dated 18 March 2024.
 - The development proposed is the retention of 14 solar panels on the south east facing roofslope. Resubmission of 3/2023/0297.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. At the time of my visit, it was clear that the development proposed in the planning application, the subject of this appeal, had been completed. The Council dealt with the application as being retrospective. I have no evidence to suggest that the installation of the solar panels has been otherwise undertaken than in accordance with the submitted plans. I have therefore determined this appeal on the basis of the plans considered by the Council.
3. Prior to my determination of this appeal, the Government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) on 12 December 2024 which replaced the previous version. I have taken into account the relevant provisions of the revised version in the determination of this appeal and any references to the Framework in this decision relate to the revised document.
4. In light of the retrospective nature of the development, the Council changed the description of application Ref 3/2023/0973 from that contained on the application form to 'retention of 14 solar panels on south east facing roofslope. Resubmission of 3/2023/0297'. This is a more accurate description of the development which I have therefore used in the determination of this appeal.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the development preserves the character and appearance of the Grindleton Conservation Area and the Forest of Bowland National Landscape.

Reasons

6. The appeal property comprises a predominantly stone built two-storey detached dwelling, with some rendered elements and having a slate roof. It is located to the southeast of the junction of Main Street with Lower Chapel Lane

and lies within the Forest of Bowland National Landscape area and the Grindleton Conservation Area. The property is orientated such that the front elevation faces towards Lower Chapel Lane with the rear elevation facing over a substantial garden area. The western side elevation faces towards Main Street from which the property is separated by a substantial stone wall.

7. The surrounding area comprises predominantly of residential properties having a variety of design styles and construction ages. However, properties in the vicinity are mainly of stone construction with slate roofs. These building materials are widely used in the locality and are features that make a significant contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. The wider area comprises open countryside formed of agricultural land and woodland.
8. The installation of the 14 solar panels on part of the rear southeastern facing roof slope has involved the removal of a relatively large area of roof slates to enable the panels to be fitted flush to the remaining roof slates that surround them. At my site visit, I did not observe any other properties in the immediate vicinity which had any roof mounted solar equipment installed.
9. The full extent of the southeastern roof slope is not readily visible due to local topography and substantial planting within the rear garden of the property. However, the panels are visible in northerly views from Main Street in the vicinity of the appeal property. In this regard, I do not share the views expressed in the submitted Heritage Statement that the panels are almost entirely concealed from public view. Whilst I accept that the coursed stonework on the south-west gable of the appeal property is the dominant feature, views of the roof also make a significant contribution to the overall appearance of the property when observed from Main Street and contributes to the character of the Conservation Area.
10. Although I recognise that the installation has attempted to integrate the panels within the roof slope, the reflective surfacing used in the construction of the panels contrasts markedly with the remaining area of the slate roof on this part of the dwelling. This addition of modern materials has the effect of 'drawing the eye' to the panels in views from Main Street.
11. In such views, the panels appear as a discordant and incongruously prominent feature which unacceptably contrasts with the traditional materials used in the construction of the dwelling and which are common to this part of the Conservation Area. Consequently, they form a noticeable, stark and isolated modern addition to the roof-scape and appear as an uncharacteristic feature in this part of the Conservation Area.
12. The Planning Officer's Report refers to an extract from the Grindleton Conservation Area Management Guidance (2005). This identifies the importance of the roof as often being a dominant feature of a building and that the retention of the original structure, cladding and ornament is important.
13. Against the above background, I conclude that the development neither preserves nor enhances the character or appearance of the Grindleton Conservation Area. In the context of the Framework great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset. Although I consider the harm to be less than substantial, any harm should require clear and convincing justification.

14. I have taken into account the contribution that the solar panels can make to a reduction in carbon emissions and the Appellant's contention that this constitutes a public benefit. In addition, I have also taken into account the guidance provided in paragraph 167 of the Framework regarding the significant weight that should be given to energy efficiency developments to existing buildings. However, I do not consider that the energy efficiency benefits and the modest contribution that the panels would make to a reduction in the carbon footprint of the appeal property would constitute a public benefit of an extent that outweighs the great weight that the Framework places on the conservation of designated heritage assets. In this case there are no other public benefits that would outweigh the harm.
15. Turning now to consider the impact on the Forest of Bowland National Landscape, Key Statement EN2 of the Core Strategy 2008 – 2028 A Local Plan for Ribble Valley (Core Strategy) sets out, amongst other things, that the Council will expect development to be in keeping with the character of the landscape, reflecting local distinctiveness, vernacular style, features and building materials. The panels would unlikely be discernible in distant views from outside the settlement. However, the appearance of this part of Grindleton, comprising of predominantly stone built dwellings with largely uninterrupted slate roofs, forms an integral aspect of the character of this part of the National Landscape area.
16. The installed panels appear as a modern and reflective feature that fail to respect the character of this part of Grindleton and hence fail to respect, enhance or conserve the natural beauty of the area. Although Policy DME5 of the Core Strategy provides support for the development of renewable energy schemes, this is on the proviso that such development would not cause harm to the local environment having regard to the immediate and wider impact of the development on the landscape, including its visual impact. In this case, I have found that the appearance of the development is at odds with the visual character of this part of the National Landscape area and is therefore contrary to the provisions of Policy DME5.
17. In conclusion, the development conflicts with Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and would be contrary to Key Statements EN5 and EN2 and Policies DME4, DMG1 and DME5 of the Core Strategy. These policies, amongst other things, require heritage assets and their settings to be conserved and where appropriate enhanced. In addition, development should be sympathetic to its surroundings and the landscape and character of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now National Landscape) should be protected and conserved. The above harms significantly and demonstrably outweigh the energy efficiency benefits of the development when assessed against the policies in the development plan and the Framework taken as a whole.

Conclusion

18. For the above reasons, taking into account the development plan as a whole based on the evidence before me and all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Stephen Normington

INSPECTOR