

STATES OF JERSEY

Report to the Minister for Growth, Housing and the Environment

Appeal by Mr C Le Gros under Article 108 of the Planning and Building (Jersey) Law 2002, as amended, against the refusal of planning permission under ref RP/2018/1622) for revised plans previously approved under ref P/2018/0042 to convert a barn at Mont Cochon Farm, La Rue de Trachy, St Helier, JE2 3JN into 1 two-bedroom dwelling including enlargement of a door on the south elevation.

Date of site inspection: 5 August 2019

Inspector: Roy Foster MA MRTPI

Introduction

1 Mont Cochon Farm is a former farmhouse set back from La Rue de Trachy with a walled farmyard to the front on one side. The yard includes three outbuildings, two already converted into dwellings. The third building (the subject of this appeal) retains its original appearance as a barn and is currently used for storage purposes. The farmhouse and its outbuildings are all traditional granite structures assessed as being of 17th Century origin. A substantial wall with an arched opening enclosing the yard from the road. The farm group is listed Grade 4 on Jersey's Register of Buildings and Sites of Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Importance.

2 Under a previous planning application (P/2018/0042) permission was granted for the conversion of the barn into a 2-bedroom dwelling. This scheme provided an entrance hall, two bedrooms and bathroom accommodation on the ground floor with doors and windows to the yard retained in their present form. The first floor would contain a kitchen and living accommodation within an open-plan space. This floor would be lit by 6 roof lights and a pair of glazed doors within a new opening inserted into the gable elevation at the south end of the building. These doors would open onto a balcony facing La Rue de Trachy but both the doors and the balcony would be partly masked from the road (and from St Andrews Park on the opposite side of the road) by the slope of the farmyard wall at that point.

3 The sole difference between the scheme granted permission (P/2018/0042) and the appeal scheme (RP/2018/1622) is that the width of the opening containing the doors in the southern gable elevation would be 1.25m in the former case and 2.5m in the latter.

The issue in this appeal

4 It is clear that the issue in this appeal is whether or not the proposed change to the southern elevation of the barn would be harmful to the character and setting of the Listed Building.

Discussion of the issue

5 In the appellant's view the first floor living area (approx. 11m x 4m) would feel 'quite claustrophobic' if the 6 roof lights, offering only sky views, were to be supplemented only by vertical fenestration in the form of the 1.25m wide opening containing the glazed doors to the balcony. Having a direct connection with outdoors is important to the users of a building, as is the ability to open a window to gain fresh air and connection with the outside. As recognised in Section 3 of the Island Plan, the historic environment cannot in practice be preserved unchanged and it is important to assess impacts on the historic environment alongside other considerations.

6 As the owner of a historic building the appellant states that his other developments at the site have recognised the need for heritage conservation and the refused scheme reflects this concern by placing the bedrooms on the ground floor of the barn to minimise the need for new openings. In his opinion it will be important for residents at the property to maximise the amount of natural light reaching the upper room. The larger doors would not represent an insensitive alteration or have an adverse effect on the character of the building or the reasons why it was listed. The specific provisions of IP policy HE1 and the more generally expressed aims of policies SP4 and GD1 would not be undermined. Section 2.32 of the IP recognises that *"economic prosperity can secure the continued vitality and the continued use and maintenance of historic buildings, provided that there is a sufficiently realistic and imaginative approach to their alteration and change of use, to reflect the need of a rapidly changing world."*

8 The applicant believes that some other examples of completed alterations to listed structures can be taken to "establish the extent of permissible alterations to historical buildings." For example, The Old Station House (Grade 4) was converted into a house in 2005, including significant alterations, extensions and modifications to historic elements of the building. An old granite barn on the main road to St Peter's was converted into a house with a large opening on the gable end, visible from the road.

9 The Historic Environment Team consider that the permitted scheme provides the upper room with sufficient light. On the other hand, the appeal scheme's proposed doubling of the width of the doors in the gable end would create an excessively wide opening with too little retained masonry at both ends of the lintel, thus reducing the solid-to-window ratio of the gable and causing harm to the vernacular form and integrity of the historic barn. The setting of the other farm buildings and the Listed Place across the road at St Andrews Park would also be adversely impacted.

10 At the time of my visit the outline of the proposed opening was marked with tape on the gable end of the building. In my view this served to demonstrate that the Committee was justified in its decision (after a visit) to refuse the application. Unlike the narrower opening allowed in the permitted scheme the wider set of proposed glazed doors would stand out uncomfortably at this height within the gable end and appear as a rather dominating feature out

of proportion with the traditional form of the building. Although living conditions for residents of the converted barn would be marginally improved by the wider opening, the resulting degree of compromise to the special interest of the listed building outweighs that benefit. I accept that views of the opening from La Rue de Trachy and the listed St Andrews Park would to various extents be masked by the enclosing wall or by trees within the park, but this does not nullify the impact of the change upon the historic fabric of the barn and the setting of the other nearby listed structures. The scheme would therefore undermine the objectives of IP policies HE1, SP4 and GD1.

11 I have considered the appellant's representations concerning alterations to two other historic buildings but the building at The Old Station is of a very different nature. The other building referred to by the appellant is thought by the Department to be No.6 The Yews. In my view that building can be distinguished from the barn in the appeal scheme as the narrow opening in the gable at first floor level at The Yews is not dissimilar to that permitted at the appeal site and the wider opening at ground floor level is said to have been a pre-existing one.

RECOMMENDATION

12 I recommend that the appeal be dismissed.

Roy Foster