



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 February 2018

by **Helen Cassini BSc(Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 February 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/W/17/3178692

Countess Hey, Elmridge Lane, Chipping PR3 2NY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Hugh Gornall against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref: 3/2017/0192, dated 20 February 2017, was refused by notice dated 20 April 2017.
 - The development proposed is a change of use of former agricultural building to 1 no. dwellinghouse.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located outside the settlement of Longridge and is therefore within the open countryside. The building is a former agricultural barn which consists of three main sections; a central core and two identical sides. It is predominately constructed from blockwork and has a pitched roof and gable on the southern elevation.
4. Paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that new isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided, unless there are special circumstances. Furthermore Policy DMH4 of the Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy 2008-2028, A Local Plan for Ribble Valley 2014(the CS) deals specifically with the conversion of barns and other buildings to dwellings. The policy states that planning permission will be granted where the dwelling is 'not isolated within the landscape, i.e. it is within a defined settlement or forms part of an already group of buildings'. Existing residential dwellings are located in proximity to the barn and it is recognised that the proposal, being part of a cluster of dwellings, would not represent an isolated feature in the landscape.
5. Policy DMH4 of the CS also lists a number of criteria that converted buildings should comply with. Criterion 1 states that the building should be structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for extensive building or

- major alterations. A structural report¹ was prepared on behalf of the appellant and confirmed that the building is in good condition and would require relatively minor finishing activities to make it habitable. However, the Council consider that the works required for the proposed change of use would constitute a 'new build' rather than a 'conversion'.
6. Following the proposed conversion works, a substantial amount of the existing structure would remain. Furthermore, the basic structure of the building would not require significant rebuilding or strengthening. Accordingly, the proposed works are found to be necessary for the building to function as a dwelling and would not constitute a new build.
 7. Criterion 3 of Policy DMH4 further states that the building and its materials should be worthy of retention because of its intrinsic interest or potential or its contribution to the setting. In addition, the character of the building and its materials should be appropriate to its surroundings.
 8. Due to its derelict state and construction from mainly blockwork, the existing building has no traditional features. Thus, the building in its current state has limited merit and intrinsic interest. The building therefore has a neutral effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
 9. The site is located within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the AONB). It is recognised that the Framework encourages the conversion of redundant or disused rural buildings where it would lead to an enhancement of the immediate setting. However, the Framework also makes it clear that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. As AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty, great weight should be given to the conservation of them.
 10. The area adjacent to the appeal site is characterised by open and verdant countryside. A modest number of dwellings and farm buildings are also evident. The residential dwellings vary in scale but are predominately 2-storey, finished in local stone.
 11. The planning history of the site is noted, in particular that the site has been the subject of a previous refusal for planning permission² for a similar scheme. The amendments made to the proposal before me, in light of the previous refusal, are acknowledged.
 12. The proposed removal of the existing gable on the southern elevation and replacement of existing roof tiles with blue/grey slates would allow the dwelling to be more reflective of the surrounding farm buildings. The proposed use of local stone to clad the exterior elevations and on the headers and cills would also reflect the characteristics of the surrounding locality.
 13. An external amenity area is proposed on the western side of the dwelling, following the demolition of approximately 5 metres of the existing building. This area would be screened by the existing stone wall and construction of a new wall to the south. Landscaping is also proposed on the southern and eastern boundaries, with the intention of providing additional screening.

¹ Jackson & Jones Limited Structural Condition Report April 2016

² Council reference 3/2016/0437

14. In addition to the proposed external amenity area, a lawned garden would surround the dwelling. In total the garden space would be approximately 800 square metres and as such, cannot be considered to be of a modest scale. Moreover, in order to enable access to the dwelling, a gravel driveway is also proposed which would be located adjacent to the integral double garage on the northern elevation.
15. By virtue of the proposal, the character of the site would be amended as the use would become residential. It is acknowledged that through the use of sympathetic materials the dwelling would be reflective of local characteristics. This would represent an enhancement to the immediate setting of the building.
16. However, the creation of a substantial garden area and gravel drive would result in the introduction of domestic paraphernalia on what is currently open agricultural land. It is accepted the enclosed external may well be used to house a washing line or provide a secluded area for relaxing in. However, given the scale of the garden area, domestic paraphernalia is likely to be introduced into this substantial space. Combined with the gravel drive, a resultant urbanising effect would be experienced.
17. The introduction of the gravel drive, lawned area and domestic paraphernalia would therefore undoubtedly harm the existing open, agricultural character of the site. Although the proposal would be set back from the Loud Bridge Road, the identified adverse impact would be apparent in views along the public footpath which runs adjacent to the site. To a lesser extent, the proposal would also be noticeable in longer views from within the AONB.
18. Whilst relatively localised in its extent, the proposal therefore represents a harmful visual intrusion that would be at odds with the existing character of the appeal site and surrounding area. As such, despite finding no harm with regard of the proposed character of the dwelling, it is considered that the garden area and gravel drive would have a materially adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area contrary to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
19. It is acknowledged that the proposal would provide family accommodation. Furthermore, the appellant claims that the Council has failed to deliver a significant proportion of their housing requirement since the start of the development plan period in 2008 and is also unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing. This matter is disputed by the Council.
20. Nevertheless, as identified, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. Such harm, significantly and demonstrably outweighs the limited provision of a single unit of family accommodation. Thus it follows that the proposal is contrary to Policies DMH4, DMG1, DMG2 and Key Statement EN2 of the CS. When taken together these policies seek, amongst other things, to ensure that development is sympathetic to existing land uses and the character of the locality.

Other Matters

21. It is recognised that the outcome of the application will have been a disappointment to the appellant. Furthermore, there is no doubt that communication is an important part of the planning process. However, there is

no substantive evidence before me which would lead me to conclude that a inadequate level of communication was provided by the Council.

Conclusion

22. In light of the above, and having regards to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Helen Cassini
INSPECTOR