

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 September 2016

by Alexander Walker MPlan MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 19th October 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/J3720/W/16/3150973

Stackyard, Sambourne Lane, Coughton, Warwickshire

- 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 James Sharp of National Trust against the decision of Stratford on Avon District Council.
 - The application Ref 15/03490/FUL, dated 4 August 2015, was refused by notice dated 9 December 2015.
 - The development proposed is the change of use from agricultural building to dwelling house (Class 3) and extension to south to allow provision for 5 bedroom dwelling along with alterations to associated outbuildings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. Following the Council's determination of the planning application, the Stratford on Avon District Core Strategy (CS) 2011-2031 has been adopted. As such, the policies within the Stratford on Avon Local Plan Review 1996-2011 no longer carry any weight. Accordingly, full weight is attributed to the policies within the CS.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are as follows:
 - Whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the existing building;
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - Whether the proposal would represent a sustainable form of development, with regard to its location; and,
 - If the proposal is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Inappropriate Development

4. The appeal site lies within the Green Belt. Paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the essential
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characteristics of Green Belts are their permanence and openness. Paragraph 89 of the Framework states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt shall be regarded as inappropriate development. However, there are exceptions to this presumption against new buildings in the Green Belt.

5. The appellant states that redevelopment is not inappropriate as long as the proposal *would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development*. However, this relates to limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites. The proposal is not for an infill development. As it relates to the redevelopment of agricultural buildings, it also is not previously developed land as defined in the Framework¹. Therefore the proposal does not benefit from this exemption.
6. The appellant also refers to the extension or alteration of a building not being inappropriate development provided it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. However, the proposed extension would be larger than the existing barn and therefore would be a disproportionate to the original building.
7. It is not clear from the appellant's submission whether or not the extension has been off-set against the existing concrete frame buildings. If this is the case then paragraph 89 of the Framework is clear in that any replacement building must be in the same use, which it evidently would not be.
8. I find therefore that the proposal would be inappropriate development, which, by its very definition, is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.² In accordance with paragraph 88 of the Framework substantial weight must be given to this harm.

Character and Appearance

9. The appeal site is located within a small village that comprises a collection of dwellings, a primary school and a children's nursery. To the east of the village is Coughton Court, a Grade I listed building. Much of the village, including the appeal site, and Coughton Court falls within the Coughton Conservation Area (CA). The village is typically characterised by Coughton's historic brick houses and the open countryside and parkland that surrounds it.
10. The appeal site comprises a small collection of brick buildings that were previously used for agricultural purposes. The buildings frame a courtyard that is currently overgrown and is accessed via an existing entrance off Sambourne Lane to the north of the site. A garage building and open fronted shed sit on the northern boundary with Sambourne Lane, screening views of much of the courtyard from the lane.
11. In addition to the buildings around the courtyard, there are two large concrete frame buildings located in the field to the south, which are no longer clad. These are linked to the main brick building by a dilapidated structure. Access to these buildings is through a gateway off the courtyard.
12. The building which is proposed to be extended is a single storey brick building located in the south corner of the courtyard. The proposed extension would

¹ Annex 2: Glossary of the Framework

² Paragraph 87 of the Framework

provide a perpendicular link extending off the southwest elevation, which would link with a two storey extension that would be parallel to the existing building. This part of the extension would be similar in width but slightly shorter than the existing building. As a result, the extension would create an 'H' shape building.

13. The main part of the extension would have first floor accommodation and as a result its ridge height would be approximately 1.2m above that of the existing brick building. The proposal would result in the existing building being extended by approximately 131%. Due to its height and overall size, the extension would dominate the existing single storey building. Furthermore, the 'H' shaped building and the proposed architectural detailing on the extension, in particular on its north west gable would be in stark contrast to the existing linear building, introducing an incongruous domesticated built form that would be significantly harmful to the simple, traditional agricultural form of the building.
14. I acknowledge the appellant's argument that the existing concrete framed buildings detract from the character and appearance of the area. However, they are of a typical agricultural design and form that one would expect to see in the open countryside. Whilst their removal would perhaps benefit the visual amenity of the area, this would not outweigh the harm their replacement with a large extension with a domesticated appearance would have on the character and appearance of the existing building.
15. I find therefore that the proposal would significantly harm the character and appearance of the existing building, contrary to Policies CS.9 and CS.20 of the CS, which, amongst other matters seek to ensure that development does not damage features which positively contribute to local distinctiveness and that extensions are of an appropriate scale and subservient in relation to the existing building. Furthermore, it would fail to accord with the guidance set out in the Stratford on Avon District Design Guide, which states that barn conversions should involve a minimum of change in order to maintain the agricultural character of the setting and extensions to conversions will not normally be acceptable. Furthermore, it would fail to comply with the design principles of the Framework.

Openness

16. Although large, the existing concrete framed buildings have a significant degree of permeability due to their lack of exterior cladding. The proposed extension would be substantially smaller than these buildings, although it would be higher than the most northerly one. Nevertheless, due to the solid structure of the extension it would be visually more prominent in the landscape. Its prominence would be exacerbated by its two storey height rising above the existing brick building and its overall size.
17. Furthermore, the architectural detailing of the extension and the large area of hardstanding either side of the linked element would represent a domestic form of development that would encroach into the open countryside and contrast strongly with the less formal agricultural setting.
18. I conclude therefore that the development would lead to a significant loss of Green Belt openness and would impact on the Green Belt purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

Sustainable Location

19. The appellant contends that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply and has referred me to recent appeal decisions in support of this view. The Council does not dispute this. Therefore, based on the evidence before me, in accordance with paragraph 49 of the Framework, insofar as they relate to housing supply Policies CS.15 and AS.10 of the CS are not considered up-to-date and as such attract reduced weight.
20. Paragraph 55 of the Framework promotes sustainable development in rural areas, providing it would enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.
21. Coughton has educational facilities by way of a primary school and children's nursery, which are within reasonable walking distance of the appeal site. Furthermore, there is a restaurant and a public house within the village. However, there are no other facilities or services within the village such as shops or employment opportunities. Nevertheless, there is a bus service along the A435 which runs through the village and provides access to the wider area, including Stratford and Redditch. This service appears to be regular and takes approximately 35 minutes and 20 minutes respectively. The bus stops for each of these services are within reasonable walking distance of the appeal site.
22. On this basis, whilst the village lacks facilities and services required for day-to-day living, these are readily accessible by means other than the private car. I find therefore that in accordance with paragraph 55 of the Framework, the development would maintain the vitality of the rural community in respect of its sustainable location.

Other Considerations

23. The appeal site is close to Coughton Court, which is also in the ownership of the appellant. The appellant contends that the development of the proposal and the proceeds from its sale would go towards the upgrade, conservation and improvement work to Coughton Court, including flood attenuation and building maintenance. Whilst I appreciate that the works to such a building can be extensive, and indeed expensive, there is no substantive evidence of how much the works would cost. Furthermore, there is no mechanism presented before me to ensure that the proceeds from the sale of the proposal would go towards these works. Therefore I attribute only limited weight to this matter.
24. I have also had regard to whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. Section 72(1) of the PLBCA Act, states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. This is reflected in paragraph 132 of the Framework, which 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. I note that the Council has not raised any concerns regarding the effect of the development on the CA. Whilst it would harm the character and appearance of the existing building, the proposal would not be readily seen within the context of the CA. Although the group of traditional agricultural buildings afford some positive contribution towards the significance of the CA, they are currently in a state of disrepair. The proposal would bring the buildings back into use and would use appropriate materials. When weighed against the harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the existing building, the improvements to the

overall site would result in a neutral effect, and therefore preserve the character and appearance of the CA. In addition, it would not have any significantly harmful effect on the setting of any of the nearby listed buildings. I therefore attribute moderate weight to this matter.

25. I have also had regard to the socio-economic effect of the development on the local area. The development of the site would provide some work for contractors and require construction materials. Also, the occupants would also contribute to the local economy. Furthermore, I acknowledge that the proposal would make a positive, albeit limited, contribution to the housing supply.
26. In addition, I also note that the dwelling would utilise environmental design features, which also weigh in favour of the proposal.

Conclusion

27. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In accordance with the Framework, such harm carries substantial weight. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.
28. The proposal has harmful implications for the Green Belt in terms of inappropriate development and the erosion of its openness. Furthermore, the proposal would significantly harm the character and appearance of the existing traditional agricultural building. Whilst I have found that the proposal would represent a sustainable location and have given some weight to other considerations, individually or cumulatively, these matters do not amount to very special circumstances.
29. For the reasons given above, having regard to all matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Alexander Walker

INSPECTOR