
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 February 2017

by Veronica Bond LLB (Hons), Solicitor (non-practising)

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

Decision date: 6th March 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3305/W/16/3161376
Frith Farm, Frome, Somerset BA11 5LD

- 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 A Sanders against the decision of Mendip District Council.
 - The application Ref 2016/0355/FUL, dated 27 January 2016, was refused by notice dated 24 May 2016.
 - The development proposed is farm offices.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for farm offices at Frith Farm, Frome, Somerset BA11 5LD in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 2016/0355/FUL, dated 27 January 2016, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Location and Site Plan and Plans and Elevations (both dated Dec 2015).
 - 3) The external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall be constructed in the materials shown on the application forms unless otherwise first agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are: whether the proposed farm offices are justified by the farm operation and are appropriate to the rural location; and the effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Whether offices justified

3. The appeal site is located in a countryside setting within the holding of Frith Farm. The business is a fairly large and diverse operation including arable farming, livestock including alpaca keeping, and fish breeding.
4. Core Policy 3 of the Mendip District Local Plan 2006-2029 Part 1 (adopted 15 December 2014) (LP) states that proposals for economic development will be supported in rural areas where they accord with Core Policy 4. In turn, Core Policy 4 indicates that the rural area will be sustained by supporting proposals

for the development of the rural economy which enable the establishment, expansion and diversification of business in a manner and of a scale which is appropriate to the location and constraints upon it.

5. The proposed farm offices seek to provide a level of office and storage space commensurate to the scale of the business operation, along with modest sized kitchen and toilet facilities for employees working from the offices. The office size proposed would not be excessive bearing in mind the scale and diverse nature of the farm business operation and would be sufficiently flexible to allow for growth and potential diversification. The building would be positioned on the site of a former farm building and close to existing large agricultural buildings and would not be readily perceptible in public views. It would in this way represent a proposal supporting a rural business in a manner and of a scale which is appropriate to the location and its constraints.
6. As regards the first main issue, the proposed farm offices would be justified by the farm operation and appropriate to the rural location. There would be no conflict with the underlying aims of Core Policies 3 and 4 of the LP as outlined above. The proposal would also be in line with the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) seeking to support the rural economy.

Character and appearance

7. The proposed farm offices would be of single storey design and would have a fairly steeply pitched roof, with a storage area included at roof level. Although the building would have a reasonably large footprint, it would appear very modest in size relative to the surrounding agricultural buildings. It would also be on the site of what was apparently a larger building which was destroyed by fire.
8. The large expanse of glazing to the front would identify the building as offices, rather than it appearing to be of a domestic design. The stone finish proposed would soften its appearance and link to similar materials used on other buildings at Frith Farm. Its position on site would be nestled close to large agricultural buildings and its distance from the road means it would not be prominent in public views.
9. With respect to the second main issue then, the proposal would not result in any harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. It would accord with Policy DP7 of the LP which indicates support for high quality design and proposals of a scale, mass, form and layout appropriate to the local context. There would be no conflict either with the Framework's aims of good design and to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Conclusion

10. For the above reasons, I find that the appeal should succeed. I have imposed the standard time limit condition and specified approved plans in the interests of certainty. External materials are required as proposed or otherwise agreed in writing so as to ensure that the building has a satisfactory visual appearance.

Veronica Bond
INSPECTOR