
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 February 2017

by Paul Griffiths BSc(Hons) BArch IHBC

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

Decision date: 28 March 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/V3310/W/16/3159435

Wedmore Baptist Church, Grants Lane, Wedmore BS28 4EA

- 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 Pang Properties Ltd against the decision of Sedgemoor District Council.
 - The application Ref.50/16/00033, dated 24 May 2016, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2016.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of the Baptist Church and School Room into two residential dwellings.
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Preliminary Matter

1. No representative of the appellant arrived for the ARSV¹. Nevertheless, I was able to see all I needed to see for the purposes of my decision unaccompanied. Neither the appellant nor the Council raised any objections to my proceeding to a decision on that basis when approached subsequently and that is the course I have taken.

Decision

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

3. This is, bearing in mind the status of Wedmore Baptist Church as a Grade II listed building, the effect of the proposal on the free flow of traffic on Grants Lane, and highway safety.

Reasons

4. The Baptist Church is currently disused and according to the appellant the condition of the building is deteriorating. As a Grade II listed building that is an important element of the Wedmore Conservation Area, it is clearly important that a new use is found for the building that will secure its future. That said, the importance of that material consideration does not automatically override all other considerations.
5. For a development of the nature proposed, in Wedmore, the Somerset County Parking Strategy requires the provision of 4 off-street parking spaces. The scheme includes none. It is clear to me that given the nature of Wedmore as a settlement, occupiers of the converted building, especially of the larger, 3-bedroom unit, would in all likelihood run a car, or indeed cars.

¹ Access Required Site Visit

6. I note the argument that re-use of the building for worship would generate a lot more traffic and demand for parking than the proposal. That may be the case but it is a consideration that only bears on my analysis if there is any realistic likelihood of such a re-use taking place. In my view, there is not.
7. Having walked from the main public car park in Wedmore to and from the site, and observed the others, it seems to me very unlikely that residents of the converted building would be prepared to use them for parking, generally. Rather, they would most likely look to park their vehicle(s) on Grants Lane, much closer to home.
8. I observed the restricted width of the thoroughfare, the nature of the through traffic, the presence of driveways, and the extent to which on-street parking in the immediate vicinity is available, in the course of my site visit. Having done so, I take the view that occupiers of the converted building would be most likely to park adjacent to the frontage of the Baptist Church, where parking is unrestricted.
9. Such parking would undoubtedly obstruct the free flow of traffic, lead to tension between vehicles travelling in opposite directions, and using driveways opposite, and push pedestrians into the road. All that would be detrimental to highway safety in the vicinity of the site contrary to the requirements of Policy D 10 of the Sedgemoor District Core Strategy 2006-27.
10. That to my mind is a weightier matter than the benefit inherent in bringing the listed building back into use. I reach that conclusion largely because I am not convinced that a residential conversion represents the only way forward for the building. Other uses, commercial in nature for example, might well make the use of public car parks by staff and visitors a more sensible proposition.
11. And if a residential conversion is indeed the only way forward, it seems to me that a more creative approach could be taken to the provision of parking, on or off site, in order to assuage the concerns I have outlined.
12. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Paul Griffiths

INSPECTOR