
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 November 2017

by Gareth Wildgoose BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 6 December 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/A0665/W/17/3179982

Land off London Road, Allostock, Northwich WA16 9LU

- 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 Carter on behalf of J L Carter & Sons against the decision of Cheshire West & Chester Council.
 - The application Ref 17/01889/FUL, dated 25 April 2017, was refused by notice dated 21 June 2017.
 - The development proposed is conversion of barn to single dwelling and erection of detached garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Council have previously granted planning permission for residential conversion of the barn¹ which remains extant, following a prior approval that was initially granted under Schedule 2, Part 3, Class Q of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015².
3. The Council have confirmed that the extant planning permission establishes the principle for conversion of the building for residential use in an isolated location where development would ordinarily be in conflict with development plan policies relating to the supply of housing. Based upon the evidence before me, I have no reason to take a different view. The Council's concerns relate specifically to the proposed alterations to the building and the addition of a detached garage, which inform the main issue below.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site lies within open countryside and consists of an agricultural building and associated land that is set back some distance from London Road with access via a track through neighbouring fields. The boundaries of the site beyond the track include tree planting and landscape bunds which partially screen the building and associated land. Nonetheless, the building is visible through existing gaps in trees including from the access point to the track.

¹ Council ref: 17/00138/FUL - Planning permission granted subject to conditions - 1 March 2017

² Council ref: 16/03299/PDQ - Prior approval required and granted - 23 September 2016

6. The existing barn is in an isolated position distant from other buildings and residential properties. The surroundings of the site consist of largely open agricultural fields with a few small wooded areas and the dispersed presence of other large agricultural buildings and farmhouses. On the opposite side of London Road and close to the entrance to the site access track, there is a small group of buildings consisting of a residential property known as Oakleigh and The Cottage, which at the time of my visit was in use as a restaurant and bed and breakfast accommodation.
7. Policy STRAT9 of the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part One) Strategic Policies (LP-Part One), adopted January 2015, seeks that the intrinsic character and beauty of the Cheshire countryside will be protected by restricting development to that which requires a countryside location and cannot be accommodated within identified settlements. It lists a number of types of development within the countryside that will be permitted which include the re-use of existing rural buildings where the buildings are of permanent construction and can be re-used without major reconstruction, which would be the case for the proposal before me. However, Policy STRAT9 also requires that development must be of an appropriate scale and design to not harm the character of the countryside. In that context, Policy ENV6 of the LP-Part One in seeking high quality design also requires that development should, where appropriate, respect local character and achieve a sense of place through appropriate layout and design.
8. The existing building consists of a steel frame with a side gable design that has external corrugated cladding to its walls and roof in a largely green colour. The existing materials blend in with surrounding trees which limits the prominence of the building within the rural setting. The building currently has only two openings, both of which are located on the south east elevation consisting of a large roller shutter door and a nearby pedestrian doorway. Consequently, the building has a distinctive form and uncomplicated appearance which reflects its agricultural function and sits comfortably within the countryside setting behind open fields where similar buildings are a common feature in the wider locality.
9. Based upon the evidence before me, the appeal proposal would largely replicate the extant planning permission in terms of an external finish of red cedar cladding, timber cladding, metal cladding and zinc roof materials, together with numerous glazed openings added on each elevation of the barn. Those alterations to the building would significantly alter its appearance and remove the perception of the functional simplicity of each elevation. However, the overall form of the building would be retained as part of the extant planning permission which would ensure that some appreciation of its original agricultural character and function would be maintained. In contrast, the proposed tall black brick chimney on the north west elevation would introduce a focal feature and prominent addition to the building that would be visible from public vantage points on London Road despite the presence of surrounding landscaping. The height and form of the chimney, when taken together with the other alterations to that elevation, would draw attention to it and unacceptably erode the building's traditional character and appearance as a former agricultural use in the countryside.
10. The addition of a porch on the south east elevation of the building would be in a less prominent position facing away from London Road and due to its modest height would have limited visibility at distance. Nevertheless, when taken

together with the other alterations and openings visible on the south east elevation and when viewed together with the south west and north east elevations, it would result in an incongruous addition to the simple and functional form of the agricultural building. The resultant effect would unacceptably erode the character, appearance and form of the building.

11. The detached garage would be sited closest to the north eastern elevation of the existing building with a perpendicular alignment on an area of hardstanding. The alignment, height, width, depth and varied materials of the proposed garage would result in a new building of considerable size with an expansive roof form which would fail to be subservient in terms of scale, massing and appearance when viewed against the overall form, shallow pitched roof design and external finish of the converted building. Consequently, the detached garage would be viewed as an unsympathetic, insubordinate and incongruous addition of built form within the site which would harm the rural setting. The presence of tree screening and the possibility of additional landscaping would have the potential to reduce the prominence of the detached garage from public vantage points at distance, but would not mitigate the harm identified. The detached garage would fail to be responsive to its context and would not improve the character and quality of the rural area and the way it functions.
12. In reaching the above findings, I afford little weight to the function of the garage or its potential to hide cars from views from London Road, given that the position of the existing building and landscaping along the site boundaries would provide alternative opportunities to suitably screen parking areas from public vantage points. I have also taken into account that, similarly to the extant planning permission, the proposal would return part of the existing hardstanding and external storage areas within the site to a grassed paddock which would have some benefit to the setting of the converted building within the countryside. However, in the particular circumstances of this case, I do not consider that those benefits offset the harm that I have otherwise identified.
13. I conclude that the development would have an unacceptable and harmful effect upon the character and appearance of the area. The proposal, therefore, conflicts with Policies STRAT9 and ENV6 of the LP-Part One. It would also be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework which seeks recognition for the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, including that the re-use of redundant or disused buildings for new isolated homes in the countryside lead to an enhancement of the immediate setting.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above and taking all other matters into consideration, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Gareth Wildgoose

INSPECTOR