
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 January 2018

by H Butcher BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 19th January 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/17/3180405

Barn at Coombe Lodge, Wantage Road, Farnborough, Wantage, OX12 8NP

- 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 N White against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 16/03381/FULMAJ, dated 2 December 2016, was refused by notice dated 22 March 2017.
 - The development proposed is the replacement of a C20th barn with a new barn to improved form.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the replacement barn on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty.

Reasons

3. Coombe Lodge is a recently built replacement dwelling which occupies a relatively large rural estate in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This includes an existing mono pitched barn to the south-east of the main dwelling. The barn fronts directly onto a Public Right of Way (PROW) and has an area of hardstanding to the front.
4. The existing barn is of modern construction and has a functional appearance. Nevertheless, it blends in with its rural surroundings being not particularly high, partly timber clad and sitting amongst existing mature trees. It is proposed to replace this with a barn of a more traditional design, constructed of traditional materials and with a rural vernacular appearance. It is also to be re-orientated away from, and side onto, the PROW.
5. Policy ENV20 of the West Berkshire District Local Plan (2007) (LP) concerns the redevelopment of existing buildings in the countryside. This sets out the criteria that such proposals should meet, which includes that it has no greater impact (in terms of the size and bulk of the buildings or site coverage) than the existing development and that it would not be visually intrusive or harmful to the amenities of the site or surrounding countryside.
6. The replacement barn would have a larger footprint and would be taller than the existing barn therefore I consider it would have a greater visual impact on

the surrounding countryside and AONB in spite of its lower eaves. I also have concerns over the position of the replacement barn. The existing barn is tucked into the edge of a field adjacent to the PROW which is lined by very large, mature trees. This significantly reduces its visual impact. The proposed replacement barn, however, along with being bigger and taller, would project out from the field boundary away from the screening provided by the trees along the PROW. It would therefore appear more prominent in the wider landscape due to its new siting.

7. As set out in the National Planning Policy Framework great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs. For the above reasons the proposal would clearly conflict with Policy ENV20 of the LP resulting in harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area and the AONB. I also find conflict with Policies ADPP5, CS14 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) which, amongst other things, seek to conserve landscape character including that of AONBs.
8. That the proposal would be an upgrading in design and would move the barn away from the PROW does not override my findings above. I understand that an enlarged barn is required for various reasons including the storage of gardening equipment, a game larder and provision of shelter and toilet facilities for staff but this does not justify the harm that I have found. Furthermore, there is nothing before me to suggest that the proposal would significantly change the fact that the appellant is a local employer such that my concerns above would be outweighed.
9. The appellant argues that a much larger barn could be erected for agricultural purposes under permitted development rights. However, there is nothing before me showing that this 'fallback' is actually available and lawful. Furthermore, given the appellant's concern over the visual impact of the existing smaller barn, their obvious interest in design, and their desire to use the replacement barn for, amongst other things, entertaining, I consider that even if such rights did apply there is no greater than a theoretical possibility that the appellant would exercise these regardless of how economically viable such an option might be. This therefore limits the weight I can attach to it as a 'fallback' position.
10. I understand the appellant received positive pre-application advice for the proposed development and can understand their frustration at then receiving a refusal of planning permission. Nevertheless, local planning authorities are not bound to accept the recommendations of their officers. I also note discussion regarding the extension of the existing barn between the appellant and the Council, but that is not what is before me and I have to arrive at a decision based on the merits of the proposal on which the Council's decision was based. Finally, the absence of letters of objection or presence of letters of support is not a determining factor in this appeal which has been determined on its own planning merits.
11. For the above reasons, and having had regard to all matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Hayley Butcher

INSPECTOR