
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 July 2019

by R Cooper BSc (Hons) MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9th August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3425/W/19/3227296

**Manor Farm Barns, High Ridge Barn, Well Lane, High Offley, Stafford
ST20 0NY**

- 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 Mrs Georgina Key against the decision of Stafford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/29380/FUL, dated 1 October 2018, was refused by notice dated 29 November 2018.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of a stables and storage area into a single storey dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are 1) whether the proposal would be an appropriate form of development in this location, having regard to relevant local planning policies; 2) the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and 3) ecology with regards to bats.

Reasons

Local Plan Policy

3. The appeal site is located within an area identified as open countryside in the Plan for Stafford Borough (PfSB) 2014. Policy E2 of the PfSB sets out the criteria for achieving sustainable rural development in such areas. In particular parts (d) and (h) allow the re-use of rural buildings, providing they are large enough, structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for extension, significant alteration or rebuilding.
4. The submitted plans and details show numerous alterations to the buildings including the removal and construction of internal walls, new external windows and doors, alteration to the external elevations including new brickwork and ship lap boarding, insertion of a flue to serve a log burner, a new chimney stack, extensions to the roof and the construction of a link to joins the two buildings. Furthermore, the structural report explains that the floors would require lowering internally to accommodate the head room required under building regulations, and that the foundations would require underpinning.

5. Taking account of the evidence before me the proposed works to convert the buildings constitute significant extension, alteration and re-building. Therefore, the proposed development does not accord with Policy E2 parts (d) and (h) of the PfSB.
6. I have taken into account the submitted structural report which concludes that the structures are in good condition and should be suitable for conversion into domestic accommodation without undue levels of demolition. However, I have to consider the evidence as a whole, and this report does not alter my findings on the main issue above.
7. The proposed dwelling would be sited adjacent to a group of buildings, comprising converted rural buildings, farm houses and St Mary's Church. The evidence before me states that there is a bus stop outside St Mary's Church, a short walk from the appeal site. This provides a regular bus service to the nearby villages of Woodseaves and Eccleshall, which collectively have a wide variety of shops and services. Based on this evidence I consider the site to be well located next to regular public transport to nearby villages and services, and consistent with Policy E2 part (f).
8. However, this does not overcome the policy conflict with regard to parts d) and h) identified above and overall the proposal does not constitute sustainable re-use of a rural building and does not accord with the overarching principles of Policy E2 of the PfSB which seeks to achieve sustainable rural development.

Character and Appearance

9. The prevailing character of the area is rural, and the appeal site is located adjacent to a group of converted agricultural buildings and High Offley Manor. These period buildings have retained their traditional well balanced form, and detailed features including red brick elevations, pitched tiled roofs, and characteristic window and door openings, all of which contribute to the distinctive setting and rural appearance of the area.
10. In contrast, the proposed dwelling would be of an unusual form, it would appear as an assemblage of different building styles and materials. The flat roofed timber clad stable element to the rear, would be at odds with the modern brick domestic bungalow appearance which would front the road. Its disjointed appearance would be incongruous and not sit well within its surroundings. The proposed dwelling would not respect the local vernacular, causing significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
11. For the above reasons I conclude that the proposed dwelling would not accord with Policies E2 and N1 of the PfSB, which collectively seek to ensure that new development respects local character and enhances its surroundings.

Ecology

12. The Council's fourth reason for refusal cites insufficient information to demonstrate that the proposal would avoid, mitigate, or compensate for any harm to protected species.
13. Since the appeal was made the appellant has submitted further evidence in the form of a Preliminary Roost Assessment for Bats & Birds (February 2019) and an Activity Survey for Bats (June 2019). The Activity Survey for Bats concludes that the proposed scheme of works would not have any negative

impact upon any bats or their roosts, and recommendations are made for the installation of bat and bird boxes.

14. The Council have commented on this further evidence and are satisfied with the findings of the survey and requested that the recommendations within the report are carried out and secured by condition.
15. I am satisfied in light of the further bat activity surveys, and the subsequent assessment, that the development would not impact on bats and meets the requirements of circular 06/2005, paragraph 175 of the Framework, and complies with Policy E2 (i) and N4 of the Plan for Stafford Borough, which collectively seek to ensure development does not harm species or habitats. I also find the relevant duties under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 are thereby discharged.

Other Matters

16. I have been provided with reference numbers from other recent appeal decisions, which the parties believe are relevant. However, I have not been provided with the full details of these cases and, as such, I can attach little weight to the Inspector's findings. In any event, I am required to reach conclusions based on the individual circumstances of this appeal.
17. The appellant has emphasised the importance of windfall sites in contributing to the housing land supply of the borough, however the Council's opinion is that they have a 5 year housing land supply. There is no evidence before me to the contrary. In any event, as 1 single dwelling in the context of the overall requirement for the Borough would be relatively inconsequential, this does not alter my conclusions on the main issues.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons identified above the appeal is dismissed.

R Cooper

INSPECTOR