
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 September 2019

by R Lankshear BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 September 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/J1860/W/19/3231183

Allsetts Farm, U64615 Broadwas, Broadwas WR6 5NS

- 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 P Brooks against the decision of Malvern Hills District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00077/FUL, dated 17 January 2019, was refused by notice dated 23 May 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as 'development of 2 no. live/work units, part retrospective'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The Council have confirmed that they no longer wish to maintain an objection to the development as set out in reasons for refusal 1 & 2 detailed within their decision notice. These relate to whether the proposals would accord with development plan policy in terms of its internal arrangement as live/work accommodation and the suitability of the location respectively. However, they confirm that they maintain their objection as set out in reason for refusal 3 relating to character and appearance. From the information before me, including the previous appeal decision relating to the site, I have no reason to take a different position and I have determined the appeal on that basis.
3. The parties indicate that the appeals are part retrospective given that the buildings subject of this appeal have partially been erected on site. However, I acknowledge that the appeal proposal seeks amendments to the erected structures and have therefore determined the appeal on the basis of the plans submitted at planning application stage.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site comprises of two partly constructed buildings, within a wider complex. This includes steel-portal buildings to the south; more traditional farm buildings converted for residential use to the east and a dwelling to the south-east. These buildings are setback from the road to the west, situated

- within open fields. A public right of way (PROW) runs along the drive serving the complex and through fields to the north and east which given the open nature of surrounding land, afford views of the appeal site from a number of public vantage points.
6. The proposals seek to provide two live/work units within an L-shaped building. It is contended that a building of this form would mirror the character and appearance of the converted barns and associated courtyard layout. This would largely retain the development present on site although would involve partial demolition of the southern projection from the building in situ and the introduction of a single storey wing.
 7. My attention has been drawn to previous appeal decisions at the site. As detailed by the Inspector dealing with the previous appeal (APP/J1860/W/18/3196575), small farmsteads or groups of buildings are a feature of the local landscape as detailed within the Principal Timbered Farmlands Landscape Character Statement and the Worcestershire Farmsteads Character Statement. Whilst I have not been provided with full details, I acknowledge that there appears to have been a number of previous developments at the site including works to the farmhouse, barn conversions and car ports. However, from my site visit observations, I have no reason to disagree with the findings of the previous Inspector insofar as the cluster of buildings largely retains the character of a farmstead appearing as a group of rural and former agricultural buildings within an open and verdant landscape, characteristic of this area.
 8. Whilst the plan form of the buildings seeks to replicate the existing farmstead layout, the proposed units would have a markedly domestic appearance on account of their design and fenestration. The two storey elements in particular would have somewhat box like proportions and the symmetrical arrangement of windows would give the impression of two substantial modern dwellings set immediately adjacent to the existing farm complex. Consequently, on account of their domestic design and scale, the units would not successfully reflect or harmonise with the existing built form including the residential barn conversions or agricultural structures. Even in the absence of specific guidance with regard to the design of live/work units, any such development should be designed appropriately to respect its context and the appeal development fails in this regard, appearing incongruous in terms of design, mass and its relationship to existing built form.
 9. The proposals would be prominent when viewed from public viewpoints including the road and PROW and appear conspicuous in the surrounding open and rural landscape. Despite the intention to use finishing materials to match those within the wider complex, given their prominence and discordant design, the appeal development would not represent a sympathetic extension to the attractive complex of farm buildings. As such it would amount to a visually intrusive and significantly harmful form of development which would detract from the character and appearance of the site which makes a positive contribution to the local landscape.
 10. The harm identified above would be amplified through the introduction of additional boundary enclosures and the likely domestic paraphernalia that would be introduced into the gardens of the proposed units. The boundaries and any associated domestic features would add to the sense of urbanisation

and would extend the residential character into the countryside beyond the site, in contrast to the present arrangement which maintains an agricultural character. Whilst I acknowledge the presence of domestic paraphernalia in association with existing converted properties, I am not persuaded that the presence of any such structures, or any existing harm, justifies further intrusive development through incremental domestication of the site.

Furthermore, owing to the open nature of the landscape and surrounding topography, I am not convinced that any such harm resulting from the appeal development could be adequately mitigated against through the suggested landscaping scheme; the hedgerows surrounding the gardens would be in a rigid pattern characteristic of domestic enclosures, as opposed to features commonly associated with agricultural buildings. For the above reasons, I do not concur that the appeal development, associated gardens and landscaping would have a positive impact upon the landscape character of the area.

11. The appellant has referred to another similar development within the area. From the information provided by the appellant I am not satisfied that the circumstances are directly comparable to the site in question which contains individual buildings set within a specific landscape context. It is unlikely that context will be replicated directly on another site elsewhere. In any event, I have determined the appeal on its individual planning merits and within its particular context, and reference to other developments in a different context does not alter my findings that the proposal would be at odds with the character of existing built form and visually intrusive within the landscape.
12. Having considered all the above, the appeal proposals would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. As such the proposals would be contrary to the provisions of policy SWDP21 of the adopted South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016 (DP) that seeks to ensure that development is of a good quality design and integrates with its surroundings; SWDP25 of the DP that seeks to ensure that development is appropriate to, and integrates with, the character of the landscape setting; and the design aims of paragraphs 127c, 130 and 170b of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons outlined above, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Lankshear

INSPECTOR