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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 September 2019

**by S Thomas BSc (hons) MSc MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 25 November 2019**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/H1840/W/19/3233080**

**Drakes Bridge, Drakes Bridge Road, Eckington WR10 3BN**

- 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 E Mustin against the decision of Wychavon District Council.
  - The application Ref 19/00940/FUL, dated 16 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 19 June 2019.
  - The development proposed is Demolition of existing garage and construction of a detached dwelling.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) whether the proposed development would preserve the setting of the adjacent Grade II Listed Building Drakes Bridge and (ii) the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

### Reasons

#### *Effect on the setting of the Grade II Listed Building*

3. The appeal site is located within the garden area of the Grade II Listed Drakes Bridge cottage. The cottage is a prominent building in the street scene given its historic character. The appeal site is a narrow plot west of the cottage that has been divided from the wider garden area to serve the proposed dwelling. It is currently occupied by a single storey detached garage set back in the plot.
4. Albeit, only recently listed, the listing description identifies Drakes Bridge Cottage as a well-constructed and legible example of a rural dwelling of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier and is of architectural and historic interest built in the vernacular traditions of the area. It retains key structural and functional elements of its historic interior. Aside from its architectural interest I consider that the large garden and the space around the cottage are key features that contribute to its character. The built form and width of the cottage distinguish it from the surrounding modern properties and the large garden within which it sits making it a focal point in the street scene. Although not specifically mentioned in the listing description the grounds and the space around the cottage are features that make a positive contribution to its setting.

5. Whilst the extent of the grounds of the property have altered over time it is clear from the 1886 ordinance survey map within the Eckington Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (2010) that the cottage has historically been set in large grounds, but historically curtailed to the north with wider boundaries to the west. Whilst the cottage has evolved since its construction the large grounds are important to its character. This is important in how the building is experienced from the street, reducing this open character around the building through construction of the proposed development would have a detrimental impact on the setting of the building and how the building is experienced. The garage would have been a later addition, but the fact it is single storey and set back, it is not a dominant feature in the street scene and is subservient to the cottage. The grounds of the cottage therefore make a significant contribution to its setting and how the property is experienced, the enclosure and development of this space would reduce this feeling of openness and would have a negative effect. The sense of space and the setting of the property is significant in creating a separation from the more modern built development.
6. The proposal would divide part of the existing garden of Drakes Bridge cottage forming a narrower plot within which to construct the dwelling. The proposed dwelling would be set further forward than the existing garage and would occupy a larger footprint. Whilst the roof heights of the properties along this stretch of the road vary to some extent, the proposed dwelling would be higher than the existing cottage and together with its scale (compared to the existing garage) would appear dominant and have a detrimental effect on the setting of the Listed Building, detracting from the sense of space surrounding the cottage. Therefore, the proposal would not preserve the key elements of the setting in terms of the openness around the cottage that make a positive contribution to it. I attach considerable weight to the need to preserve the setting of this designated heritage asset. Accordingly, I find the proposal would cause harm to the significance of Drakes Bridge Cottage as a designated heritage asset.
7. The National Planning Policy Framework states that where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. The proposal will provide one additional unit to the housing stock providing a minor social benefit but also will provide minor economic benefits through construction of the property and use of local services. Whilst reference is made to this property enabling the generation of funds to help with the urgent repair of the cottage, I have no evidence before me to indicate that funds from this scheme would be necessary to secure its optimum viable use that couldn't be achieved by other means. Therefore, these public benefits do not outweigh the harm I have identified to the setting of the Listed Building.
8. I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the setting of a designated heritage asset and would be contrary to Policies SWDP6, SWDP21 and SWDP24 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (2016) (Development Plan). These policies seek amongst other matters development to conserve designated heritage assets and their settings, be of high quality design that integrates effectively with its surroundings with particular regard to height of development being appropriate to the setting of the site and surrounding

landscape character. The proposal would also be contrary to the Framework which requires great weight to be given to an asset's conservation.

*Character and appearance of the area*

9. There is a variety of property types and sizes along Drakes Bridge Road creating a varied street scene. Thus, given the varying styles and designs of properties the proposed design of the dwelling and the use of materials which differ from surrounding properties would not be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.
10. The proposed parking for the property would be located to the front of the plot. I observed on my site visit that such an arrangement is not uncommon in the street scene with a number of properties having parking areas to the front of the property and also to the side. The appellant indicates that the previous parking arrangement for the cottage was to the front of the garage and accordingly I find that the proposed parking arrangement would not be detrimental to the street scene.
11. I acknowledge that the proposed dwelling would be sited along a similar building line as a number of other properties to the west of the appeal site and that there are examples of similar size plots in the local area. However due to its specific location and the narrowness of the plot I find that the proposal would result in a cramped form of development situated between two properties with relatively large plots. This combined with the limited separation distance between the property and its boundaries would give a visual appearance of it being squeezed into the plot. I therefore consider it would appear incongruous and out of character with the settlement pattern thereby having a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area.
12. For the reasons outlined above, the proposal would conflict with Policies SWDP21 of the Development Plan (2016) and the South Worcestershire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2018) which seek amongst other matters that development integrates effectively with its surroundings, complements the character of the area and responds to surrounding buildings.

**Other Matters**

13. Whilst the site is not within the Eckington Conservation Area (ECA) it lies in close proximity to it. Both parties agree that there would be no harm to the character or appearance of the ECA. Based on the evidence before me I have no reason to take a different view.
14. Whilst the appeal proposal may be in a sustainable location with good access to local services and facilities without reliance on a private vehicle, this does not outweigh the identified harm and the resultant conflict with the development plan. Therefore, the proposal does not comprise sustainable development.

**Conclusion**

15. For the above reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

*Stephen Thomas*

INSPECTOR