



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 December 2019

by C Cresswell BSc (Hons) MA MBA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 27 December 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/19/3237271

Cambridge Barn, New Portreath Road, Redruth TR16 4QL

- 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 Mark Hitchen against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA19/05819, dated 24 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 2 September 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as 'replacement dwellings for properties known as Unit 1 & 2, Cambridge Barn'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal concerns a single storey building which has been subdivided into two semi-detached dwellings (Units 1 & 2 Cambridge Barn). It is situated in the open countryside close to a number of other properties.
4. It is proposed to convert Units 1 & 2 into storage buildings and construct two new replacement dwellings on adjacent land. Policy 7 of the Local Plan¹ allows replacement dwellings in the open countryside where they are 'broadly comparable to the size, scale and bulk of the dwelling being replaced and of an appropriate scale and character to their location'.
5. The replacement dwellings would be two stories in height and much bulkier than Units 1 & 2, which are more modest single storey properties. However, an Appeal Decision² in 2015 gave planning permission for the units to be significantly extended, including the addition of a first floor. I am informed that this permission remains extant and, hence, there is a realistic prospect of it being implemented. This fallback position is therefore a material consideration to which I attach substantial weight.

¹ Cornwall Local Plan Strategic Policies 2010-2030.

² Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/15/3004686.

6. The replacement dwellings would be far more comparable in size to Units 1 & 2 if they were extended as anticipated. However, even if I were to agree that the replacement dwellings would be 'broadly comparable to the size, scale and bulk of the dwelling being replaced' in the context of Policy 7, the proposed development would still need to have an acceptable effect on character and appearance to comply with the terms of that policy.
7. Units 1 & 2 are situated in close proximity to Cambridge Farmhouse to the immediate west and Cambridge Barn to the immediate east, which are established two storey dwellings. To the north, behind these dwellings, there is a raised bank containing trees and shrubs. Alongside other properties in the immediate vicinity, they form a small group of buildings which are distinct from the rows of holiday units further to the east.
8. As noted by the Inspector in the 2015 Appeal, this group of buildings stand about mid-point on a hillside with mostly open fields above them to the north. When viewed at distance from New Portreath Road, trees and vegetation partly obscure these properties, softening their appearance. Although the rows of holiday units to the east of this building group are more prominent features in the landscape, the land further up the hillside is distinctly open and rural in character (even though there are some other buildings present).
9. The replacement dwellings would be constructed to the north of Units 1 & 2, slightly further up the hill on the other side of the vegetated bank. This land is mainly open and grassy, but contains a stone built garage/storage building (with a drive leading to it) and a larger timber building. As such, it maintains a more rural appearance than the established group of buildings immediately to the south (including Units 1 and 2) which are confined to a lower level on the hillside and have well defined residential curtilages.
10. The replacement dwellings would be situated on a slightly more elevated part of the site than The Boardmans (immediately to the east) and would therefore be visually distinct from it. Although the replacement dwellings would be dug into the site, reducing their overall height, they would nonetheless be relatively large detached properties. Side by side, both dwellings would create a substantial built frontage which would appear more characteristic of a residential street than a rural setting such as this.
11. Although the replacement dwellings would only be seen at close quarters within the confines of the site, the visual qualities of places are experienced from the private domain as well as the public domain. Indeed, Policy 12 of the Local Plan emphasises the need to maintain local distinctiveness and achieve good standards of design in all new developments.
12. From public viewpoints, the site is visible at distance from New Portreath Road. Although the new dwellings would be partly obscured by trees and other buildings, their position above the main building group would make them more conspicuous features than Units 1 & 2 (if extended). This would be emphasised by their relatively large built frontage. While the dwellings would not be highly prominent when seen at distance in the landscape, the creep of development up the hillside would nevertheless be perceivable.

13. Overall, the proposed replacement dwellings would be more visually intrusive than extending Units 1 & 2. They would result in cumulative harm to the rural qualities of the landscape. In reaching this decision, I am guided by the strong emphasis placed on good design and local distinctiveness within the Local Plan and the aim of the National Planning Policy Framework to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
14. My attention has been drawn to a number of other planning permissions that have been granted close by. This includes extensions to The Boardmans³ and changes to the use of Burleigh Cottage⁴ (previously a storage building) from holiday accommodation to permanent residential use. In both instances there were already buildings present, whereas the current proposal involves developing a part of the site that is currently open. This is also the case at the site I have been referred to at Bartrez Meadow⁵ where a large detached dwelling was granted planning permission on the site of two holiday units. In the current appeal, the existing buildings (Units 1 and 2) remain in place and the replacements occupy a separate site that is mainly free of existing development. As such, I do not consider that any of these planning permissions are directly comparable to the appeal proposal.
15. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with Policies 7, 12 and 23 of the Local Plan which, collectively, seek to reinforce local distinctiveness through good design.

Other matters

16. The proposed extension to Units 1 & 2 would result in these dwellings becoming taller and bulkier. As such, they would be clearly visible from Cambridge Farmhouse to the immediate west. From the rear garden of the neighbouring property, the side elevation of Units 1 & 2 would be seen high above the level of the existing wood store.
17. Yet although this elevation would be relatively close to Cambridge Farmhouse, it would not lead to an unacceptable sense of enclosure, loss of light or airflow. Furthermore, Cambridge Farmhouse benefits from other areas of outdoor amenity space and the main outlook from inside the property is towards the south, away from Units 1 & 2. Overall living conditions would therefore remain acceptable. While I do appreciate the neighbouring occupier's concerns, any small benefits to living conditions that would result from the appeal proposal would not outweigh the harm identified above.
18. The appellant points out that the replacement dwellings would be for his family who work on the site. However, it is not entirely clear from the evidence provided why Units 1 & 2 could not adequately fulfil this need in the event of them being extended. I am also mindful that the proposed replacement dwellings are likely to be enduring features of the landscape well beyond the current needs of the appellant. It is therefore necessary to maintain appropriate standards of design.

³ Council Ref: PA12/04574

⁴ Appeal Decision: APP/D0840/W/17/3180021

⁵ Council Ref: PA19/00820

Conclusion

19. I have found that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. The conflict with Local Plan policies in this regard would not be outweighed by other planning benefits. For the reasons given above, the appeal should therefore be dismissed.

C Cresswell

INSPECTOR